

“What Will We Give?”

I Chronicles 29:1-9

First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

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Last summer my sister, my children and I made a day trip to Canton, MO. For those who don't know, Canton is a small town in northeast Missouri, right on the Mississippi River.

But, why did we go to Canton?

Well Canton is the home of Culver-Stockton College, which is not only one of our Disciples' schools, but is also where both my sister and I attended college.

So, our trip was part nostalgia - after all Amy and I both get a bit misty arriving at the hill where the college sits or walking along that stretch of the Mississippi River.

It was also part hope - what a treat it would be if either of my children decided to make Culver their college home.

And, it was part connection - as we were given a tour by a lovely staff person who still works there all these years later.

It was on that tour that I had a surprising moment of inspiration. As all of you likely know, it is common for buildings on college campuses to be named after people. Sometimes these are people who played an important part in the college's history. Sometimes they are people who have given generously to the building project.

And, not only are buildings named, but often parts and pieces within them. You'll have a stadium named after one person and the field inside it named after another. You'll have a building named after one person with the lobby named after another, a special meeting room named after another, and the list goes on.

The surprise came when we entered one of the newer buildings on Culver-Stockton's campus and saw the name of someone we had been in school with. It wasn't someone I knew well, not someone I had kept up with. I didn't know what he was doing professionally now. But, as soon as I saw his name on the wall, I knew exactly who it was. And I had a moment of having to realize that apparently we were now old enough to *be* those people - the ones who give significant gifts to places and causes that matter to them.

After I got over my shock that all the names on the buildings *weren't* of people much older than me...after I remembered that these kind of gifts don't only come through estates after people have died, but are often actually given within a person's lifetime...it caused me to wonder how I might increase my commitment both to Culver-Stockton and to other organizations that matter to me.

While I have been an annual giver to my alma mater since graduating, and while I have no desire for my name to be on any building, still this gift - given by a former classmate of mine - inspired me to consider what my role in the future of a place I love dearly might be.

King David, as he neared the end of his life, chose the role he would have in helping see that the temple came to be. And he hoped others would be inspired by it.

After all, David had been wanting a temple to be built for years. Ever since he was settled in Jerusalem and living in a palace, he had struggled with the reality of the tabernacle, a portable place of worship. While the tabernacle had served the people well throughout their history moving from place to place, David only seemed to see the disparity between he himself living in a large, lovely palace while God's place was essentially a tent that could be put up and taken down at will.

And yet, the answer that came through the prophet Nathan was that it would not be David who built the temple. Rather his son, Solomon, would be the king to oversee that project.

Not one to be discouraged, David both accepted that the temple would come later while also helping to ensure that would happen. And so, over the course of the several chapters in I Chronicles leading up to today's reading, we see David making preparations for the temple, handing plans off to Solomon, and then - in what we heard today - making his own commitments and asking commitments of others so that the work can be sure to be done.

In fact, after relaying what he will give to this project, David asks, "Who then will offer willingly, consecrating themselves today to the Lord?" (I Chronicles 29:5, NRSV). See, even though the gifts of stones and metals and other valuables were important, David understood this as being about more than the gifts that were given. He understood it as being about more than getting recognition for generosity. He understood the giving that he did, and that others were invited into, to be about "consecrating themselves...to the Lord," about dedicating not only their wealth but also their very being to the God with whom they were in relationship.

And that is such an important thing for us to remember. It is central to why last week Kent asked that the first act of participation in our capital campaign be prayer. He asked us to pray for our congregation and its leaders. He asked us to pray for our willingness, as a congregation, to reclaim the vision God has set before us and our identity as God's people holding central our values of welcome, openness, and care of people and the world beyond these walls. He asked us to pray for discernment that we might use the resources we have, collectively and individually, for the ministry to which First Christian is called.

And I suspect those prayers will also often remind us of the people in our lives, whether they have any connection to this congregation or not, who have modeled generosity for us.

Who are those people for you?

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Maybe it is the teacher who knew what was lacking in your home life and took you under her wing making sure you had love, attention, access to books, encouragement, a warm meal.

Maybe it is an elderly person in the church in which you grew up who gave generously to ministries for children and youth, or who took time to learn each child's name.

Maybe it is a grandparent who always had time to sit with you and listen to your stories, hear your questions, help you discover new ideas that encouraged you to grow.

Maybe it is a neighbor who doesn't have much in the way of material possessions, but who always finds the resources to share a meaningful gift at just the right time.

Maybe it is the richest person you know who you have often said seems like a "normal" person and who you have watched give generously, often behind the scenes, to make sure your community is the best it can be.

Who is it that inspires you to be generous?

How do you respond to that inspiration?

Sally read to us about how all of those to whom David was speaking gave in response to his generosity. Some likely gave out of their love for God. Some out of their love for David. Some likely gave because they believed in the project; others because they wanted to leave a legacy. Some likely gave as an act of hope, others as a way to show their commitment to the common goal of their community. Perhaps for most it was all of these reasons and more.

Each of them responded to the question of what they would give. Each of them dug deep, not only into their pockets, but into the core of their being, and discovered the generosity they were called to practice.

What about us?

How are we called to be generous?

Who will we inspire with our generosity?

How will we honor God's generosity in the ways that we live?

What will we give of ourselves and of our possessions to be partners in the work of God in this world?